

# Making Temporary Structural Repairs after a Disaster

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## General

There's more to worry about than broken windows and leaking roofs when inspecting a house for weather damage.

You have to make sure there's no live power in or around a house. Make doubly sure that main breakers at the service entrance are off. If you're in doubt, wait for the power company to come check it out.

Any temporary structural repairs that can be made will require some creativity since there's likely to be a shortage of materials. The most common repairs will involve nailing plywood or taping heavy plastic to broken windows, ceilings and walls.

## Tips

- Check for structural damage to make sure the building is not in danger of collapsing.
- Turn off any outside gas lines at the meter or tank and let the house air for several minutes to remove foul odors or escaping gas.
- If you must enter at night, carry a battery-operated flashlight. Don't use a flame as a light source. Do not smoke.
- Shovel out mud while it's still moist to give walls and floors a chance to dry. Once

plastered walls have dried, brush off loose dirt. Wash with mild soap and rinse with clean water; always start at the bottom and work up. Ceilings are done last. It's also important to clean out heating and plumbing systems. Clean metal at once, then wipe with a kerosene-soaked cloth. A light coat of oil will prevent iron from rusting.

- Flooded basements should be drained and cleaned as soon as possible. However, structural damage can occur by pumping out the water too quickly. After the floodwater around your property has subsided, begin draining the basement in stages, about one third of the water volume each day.
- If the building has shifted or the floors have settled badly, it may be necessary to install temporary bracing until extensive work can be done.
- To prevent flooded wooden floors from buckling and warping further, drive nails where the floor tends to lift or bulge.
- Remove loose plaster. After the house is completely dry, repair damaged plaster on walls and ceilings. Badly damaged plaster walls can be resurfaced with gypsum board or plywood.

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*For more information, contact your local office of Virginia Cooperative Extension.*

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